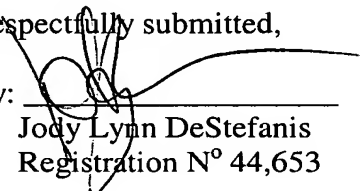


Application. This rejection was successfully traversed by a Rule 131 Affidavit claiming an invention date prior to the '408 Patent's filing date. A copy of this Affidavit is attached for the Examiner's convenience. Because the present patent application claims priority to the '324 Application, the present patent application is also entitled to the benefit of this earlier invention date (see MPEP 201.06(c) entitled "Copy of Affidavits"). Accordingly, Applicants believe that the removal of the '408 Patent as a reference with respect to the currently pending claims is warranted.

Accordingly, Applicants submit the present invention as presently claimed is patentable and respectfully requests reconsideration and further consideration of the application. If the Examiner has any questions or believes that a discussion with Applicants' attorney would expedite prosecution, the Examiner is invited and encouraged to contact the undersigned at the telephone number provided below.

Date: Sept. 10, 2003
 Schlumberger-Doll Research
 36 Old Quarry Road
 Ridgefield, Connecticut 06877-4108
 Phone: (203) 431-5505

Respectfully submitted,

By: 
 Jody Lynn DeStefanis
 Registration N° 44,653